

Well seeing as next Sunday is Easter Sunday that makes today Palm Sunday. If anyone is not aware, Palm Sunday is the Sunday before the week leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection. It's called Palm Sunday because we are told that great crowds of people worshipped Jesus as they welcomed Him into Jerusalem with Palm tree branches as He rode in on a donkey. In fact they are having a worship time! The crowds in Jerusalem are lavishing attention and honour on Jesus, using their clothes as a saddle for Jesus, using palm branches as a red carpet for His entry as they shout and sing "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" This is a scene of profound praise and worship and it's recounted in all four gospels. I believe that the Holy Spirit wants to speak to us this morning about what it means to be worshippers. I'm going to take this Palm Sunday opportunity to talk to you about something very dear to my own heart: Praise & worship. Now this is a vast subject with massive implications and if I'm going to say anything of value to you this morning then I need to pray so please join me now.

Did you know that as a believer in Christ, worship is your highest calling in life? God created the world and created us for no other reason than to worship Him? And after the fall, when sin entered the world, he redeemed us that we might be able to worship Him again. God desires to make worshippers out of you and me. In fact, I would go as far to say that everything God does in your life is to make you a more profound worshipper. The trials we face, the people we deal with, the struggles we have, the places God takes us are all part of our worship school training! If you're a follower of Jesus Christ this morning then you are called to be a worshipper before you're called to do anything else. You've heard people ask that philosophical question 'what's life all about?' I love the old Presbyterian answer, they used to answer, 'the chief end of man is to glorify God & enjoy him forever.' The Theologian, John Stott said, 'Worship is the highest and noblest activity of which man, by the grace of God, is capable.'

So using this praise and worship scene: the triumphal entry, this morning we're going to firstly look at why Jesus deserves our worship, secondly that Jesus delights in our worship and finally see that Jesus desires our worship.

As I said earlier each of the four gospel writers recount the triumphal entry and all together, the four gospels writers paint a more complete picture of the scene than just one of them can so I am going to borrow bits from their different accounts this morning. But for now here's John's account. So please read with me and it will hopefully appear on the screens behind me.

**12** The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. **13** So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" **14** And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, **15** "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" **16** His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to

him. **17** The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. **18** The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.'

John 12:12-18

To add to this, and for the sake of this morning's message, I also want you to note Jesus' take on what is happening which Luke recounts for us: 'some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." (*That is for worshipping him*) But Jesus answered them, "I tell you, if they were silent, the very rocks would cry out."

Luke 19:39-40

So my first point this morning is that Jesus deserves our worship.

### **Jesus deserves our worship**

John tells us that 'they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" The people are having a worship time like we just had this morning. They're crying out "Hosanna!" which is simply a word of praise and adoration, we sang it this morning, it literally means "save us" It's a cry for salvation, while at the same time it's a declaration of praise. Zechariah had prophesied about 500 years before this day saying 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey' (Zech 9:9) The people realize that this prophecy is being fulfilled right before their very eyes and understandably they're so excited about who Jesus is that they erupt in praise.

That's what worship is. It's the expression of gratitude, appreciation and excitement. A.W. Tozer, said that worship means to 'feel in the heart' In fact the dictionary defines worship as 'the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration'. It's when we are moved by God and get stirred about all that He is and does. The crowds stood at the side of the road couldn't help but pour out praise and adoration, bowing low before Almighty God in their midst.

Martin was telling me that when he was in Wales recently he got into a debate with a lecturer about worship, and this lecturer said, 'Now Martin, we don't believe in feeling when it comes to worship - we don't bring our senses or our emotions into this.' To which Martin replied, with utmost respect, 'that's cobblers!' - which if you want a translation from the anglo-saxon, means 'what a load of rubbish!' How can we possibly worship God without our emotions, our affections being stirred! And of course our senses are involved - it's through our senses - our eyes and our hearing - that we perceive truth about God. Now they had a good edifying debate about this, but tragically there is this misconception in the evangelical church that feelings must be left out of worship. But worship is more than just an intellectual exercise. Worship is our hearts being stirred by truth about God - He wants our affections stirred for Him as we remember how he loves us, cares and provides for us, how he showers us with blessings, how He died in our place on the cross to redeem us back to Himself. And we respond by overflowing praise. One person said, 'Worship is the overflow of a grateful heart, under the sense of divine favour' (Chuck Smith). As David cries in Ps 34:1, 'I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth' and Is 12:5,

“Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things.” God and his goodness should overwhelm you and praise just can’t be contained.

Why are these people heaping praise on Jesus? Because of who He is: the Son of David; the Deliverer, the King and because of what He has done: the miracles, signs and wonders among them. He’s touched their lives and restored them. You know, it’s a sad story when we’re not able to find things to praise God for. We ought to be desperate to praise Him, corporately and on our own. Sure there are times when we don’t feel like singing or clapping but we can still remain in an attitude of worship. In Luke’s account he notes that they were ‘all: that is the whole multitude,’ praising God: the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice it says. Spurgeon comments, “And yet, I suppose, those disciples had their trials as we have ours. There might have been a sick wife at home, or a child withering with disease. Yet they *all* praised Him” I’ll be honest, and please don’t fire me, but there are times when I really don’t want to get on that stage and lead the praise! But it’s in those times that I am weak that He is strong and the amazing thing is that when I begin to remember all the amazing things that God’s done in my life and how He’s been so faithful time and again that everything gets put back into perspective and I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else. Worshipping Him gets our eyes back on Him. As one person said, ‘worship reminds us of the values that the world makes us forget’ (Unknown). We need our perspective changing and worship does that.

We just have so much to praise God for this morning guys, I think you’d all agree. Sometimes we even need reminding. If I can just offer some really simple and practical advice as a worship leader because I have to ask God to stir my affection regularly because I grow dull and forget, my advice would be to be more specific in your worship. It has been said that much of our praise is mindless. And it can be. Maybe we do it out of complacency, or because everyone else around us is singing and so we think we ought to as it’s what you do in church. But these crowds are pouring out praise on Jesus and they know why. We ought to have specific things in our minds that we want to praise God for, things that we have seen Him do in our lives. One Pastor put it this way, ‘anyone who says, “Praise the Lord!” should be able to answer one question: “Praise Him for *what*?” And they should have a good answer.’ Lets be intelligent worshippers who understand something of the attributes of God: His holiness, His Mercy, His Faithfulness, His Unchanging character and lets worship Him for who He is as well as the wonderful things He’s done. How do we become intelligent worshippers? By studying God’s word, through prayer and by living a life of faith. Without doing these we will never become truly heart-engaged worshippers.

Ok so we know that Jesus deserves our worship. But now let’s look at how Jesus also delights in our worship.

### **Jesus delights in our worship**

The Theologian J.C. Ryle, when commenting on this passage, said, ‘on other occasions in Jesus’ life up until now we have seen Jesus withdrawing from public view, retiring to the desert, telling people he’s healed not to tell anyone, but on this occasion everything is different. Our Lord seems to court public attention. He wants people to take notice of

what he's doing.' Now I don't know about you but I love this slice from the life of Jesus because it feels so right. Jesus is boldly declaring himself king and receiving the praise due His name. Notice that Jesus even chose Passover: a time when huge crowds would descend on Jerusalem. Everyone would be there.

Psalm 21:4 tells us that 'God is enthroned on the praises of his people Israel.' What a picture for us to imagine; that as we gather as a church and sing praise to the Lord Jesus, he is right here in our midst being lifted high and exalted. He is exalted as we speak His praise. I love to think of this when I am singing praise. Jesus wants all eyes on Him as He rides into Jerusalem. He is about to become the great sin offering: the lamb to be slain in less than a week's time and he wants Israel to know why He is in Jerusalem: to rescue them. This is no secret. It is the greatest story ever told and He wants everyone in on it. Philippians 2:11 says 'Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So if you feel sad that you missed Jesus' triumphal entry because it was two thousand years before you were born don't worry because He's coming again and this time every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. What a glorious future and expectation awaits us.

Something else I want to pick up on which ties in with Jesus delighting in our worship is how we worship Him. These statements from the crowd, "Hosanna" and "Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord" come from Psalm 118. These people knew their bibles and their praise was Scriptural. It's important that we praise God as He wants to be praised. So if God says we are to come to Him with words and he does in Hosea 14:2, then that is how we come; speaking His praise, if God says we are to come to Him with song as the Psalms constantly do then that is how we come. If God says we are to come to Him with hands raised up as he does in Psalm 134:2 then that is how we come. The whole point in worship is to do what pleases God, not what pleases us. Sometimes it's a sacrifice and it's about being obedient. We need to be biblical in our praise and worship. Some postures of worship include standing, kneeling, prostrating ourselves, eyes lifted up, eyes cast down, and hands raised. These are all appropriate expressions of worship. One is not preferred above the other but you should worship as you feel led according to scripture.

And so we have discussed how Jesus deserves our worship and how He delights in our worship and now finally we will see how he desires our worship.

### **Jesus desires our worship**

The reason I had us read Luke's account earlier on is because in responding to some of the Pharisees in the crowd that told Jesus to rebuke the people for worshipping him, Jesus said, "I tell you, if they were silent, the very rocks would cry out." That is why I have titled this sermon 'Don't Let The Rocks Cry Out', because Jesus covets our worship. As humans created to worship we can be sure that we will worship something. What we admire, what fascinates us, what we adore. These things we will worship. My youth Pastor back in the UK used to talk about the worship that goes on at a football match,

soccer if your American, he said if you go into a football stadium what do you see? A worship time! Men everywhere with there hands raised eyes closed and singing and praising their team: here is the challenge: lets not let a group of football supporters be more excited about their favourite team than we are about Jesus Christ! What do people see when they walk into Church on a Sunday morning? Do they see people engaging their hearts with an awesome God and praising Him for all He is and does. There is no doubt that people are enraptured at a sports event. We ought to be so much more engaged even than they.

Now do you think Jesus is serious? Would the rocks be our substitute? I think He is because throughout the Bible we constantly see that creation itself praises God. The trees, hills, oceans, rivers, mountains, valleys, cattle, birds and fields all give praise to God (Psalm 148:7-13, Psalm 96:11-12). I love how Charles Spurgeon observes the birds as they worship. In fact I feel convicted myself by the birds and how they worship God, he said 'you sometimes wonder how so much sound can come out of such diminutive bodies. How they throw their whole selves into the music, and seem to melt themselves away in song! How the wing vibrates, the throat pulsates, and every part of their body rejoices to assist the strain! I think we have a lot to learn about worship from the birds!

True worship comes from a heart that truly desires Him. We see many times in scripture people sought to worship both God and idols but God is clear. We can't serve two masters. He does not want to be worshipped "half-heartedly" because he wants our total affection set on Him. We're all guilty of idolatry. How do we know if we are worshipping something else more than God? Ask yourself 'what absorbs my will, my time, my resources most of all? What can I not live without? It may be career, material possessions, money, health, even our families. Let us cry out, like King David in Psalm 63:5, "My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips, my mouth will praise you." Lets not let lesser things occupy our worship. Nothing less than God can truly satisfy our hearts.

And if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian I want you to know that God came to Earth through His Son Jesus to save us. He came as rescuer and redeemer. The people sang Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord: they sang a salvation song that God had come to save them. His love is without condition. Salvation is available to any one who puts their trust in Him and it's available to you this morning. The Bible says if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved. You were created to worship and you won't be truly satisfied until you are at peace with God and worshipping Him.

And so in closing I hope I've been able to do some justice to this incredible calling. We have more reason to worship and sing God's praises this morning than anyone else in the Universe. We have been redeemed! Jesus truly deserves, delights in and desires our worship. Let's join with the crowds of people this Palm Sunday and shout Hosanna! Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord. We've been saved, redeemed, bought back. What a glorious future and hope we have in Him. -Lets Pray.-